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An Apparently Very Old Prehistoric Camp Site

Ellison Orr

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AN APPARENTLY VERY OLD PREHISTORIC
CAMP SITE

ELLISON ORR

In the summer of 1924 the writer found along the Wisconsin shore of the Mississippi river, during a period of very low water, at a place about two miles south-east of Waukon Junction, Iowa, many small fragments of pottery, flint chips, and a couple of arrow heads.

These had been washed by current and wave action out of the matrix in which they had been imbedded. Only a few pieces were found apparently *in situ* in the clay. The current was of just the right strength to dissolve and carry away the clay and fine sand, leaving behind the slightly heavier material — the relics.

This locality, a strip of shore about four hundred feet long and six or eight wide, was carefully gone over in 1925 and 1926, resulting in the finding of considerable additional pottery, a quart or more of the flint chips, nine additional arrow heads, parts of what appear to be small chipped flint celts, a well-made, polished greenstone celt three inches long and one and one-half inches wide at the bitt, and a slightly oval hammer-stone of pinkish quartzite.

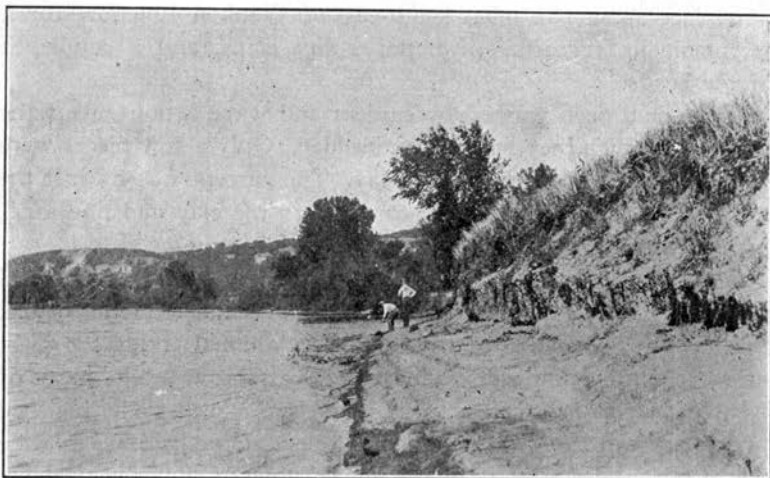
The latter had an average diameter of four and one-half inches and was one and three-eighths inches thick, with pits in the center on each side three-eighths inch deep. The perimeter showed marks of hammering and had four sizeable pieces broken out apparently from use as a hammer.

This material, so far as can be determined, came from a stratum of blue, very slightly sandy, alluvial clay with many ancient crawfish holes, the sides of which were somewhat hardened by iron oxide, and which were entirely filled with clay of a lighter shade of blue.

Immediately over this relic-bearing stratum lies seven feet of blue-black, slightly sandy clay, gradually changing to a granular, lighter, black alluvial soil in which no relics have been found. Over this lies eighteen inches of an ash-colored soil, the "made land" of the farmers, deposited by floods since the settlement of the country adjacent to the river by white men around seventy-five years ago.

This last then was laid down at the rate of about one foot in fifty years. If the entire thickness of soil over the relic-bearing stratum was deposited at the same rate, then four hundred and fifty years have passed since the material found was lost or left there.

However it is believed that the sediment laid down before the white man came was deposited very much slower. This belief has been reached by a long and careful study of the alluvial deposits laid down in the lateral valleys of the Mississippi in the driftless area.



"High Bank," two miles south-east of Waukon Junction, Ia., where relics indicating prehistoric camp site were found, Sept. 2, 1926. Relic-bearing stratum along water's edge. Looking east. Wisconsin bluffs in background.

In many of these valleys and for long distances, flood waters have cut ditches down through the alluvial soil and loess to the gravels and bed rock, exposing a great many sections for study. In many places there is less than ten feet of alluvium between the "made land" and the loess below.

It is the possibility of a very considerable age for these relics that has prompted the writing of this paper.

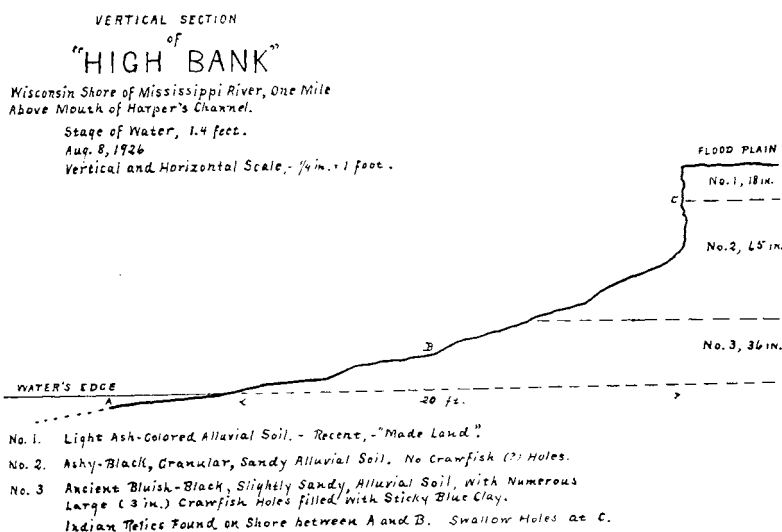
Wherever the main channel of the Mississippi makes one of its numerous crossings of the wide flood plain—over two miles wide at Waukon Junction—the course is always in a curve diagonally down stream, the current impinging strongly on the down stream bank and undercutting and washing it away.

This results in mostly vertical banks on that side, known to rivermen as "High Banks."

The relic-bearing stratum lies at the foot of a high bank near the center of the flood plain, on the crossing from Charme, Wisconsin, to the forgotten town of Johnsonport just below Waukon Junction, and three-fourths of a mile above the mouth of Harper's Channel.

It is quite likely an ancient camp site. A diligent search along the river shore for a half mile on each side resulted in neither flakes, pottery, arrow heads or any other material being found.

The arrow heads show only very ordinary workmanship and among the flakes are found many with a cutting edge on which secondary chipping has been done.



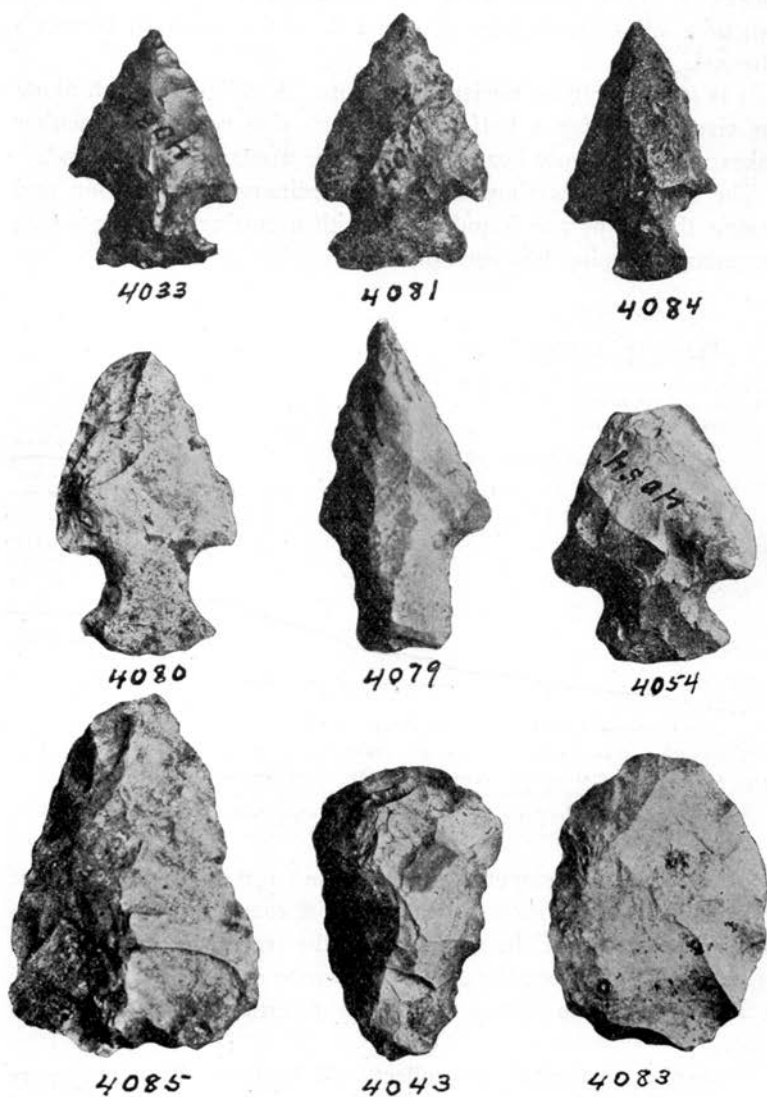
The pottery is tempered with crushed rotten granite and the pieces so far found show at least ten different patterns of decoration. On account of the smallness of the pieces, the shape of the vessels, with one exception, can not even be conjectured.

The exception is a piece of a straight vertical neck three inches long.

Future opportunities to collect will undoubtedly yield more material on which perhaps some definite conclusion as to age and culture may be reached.

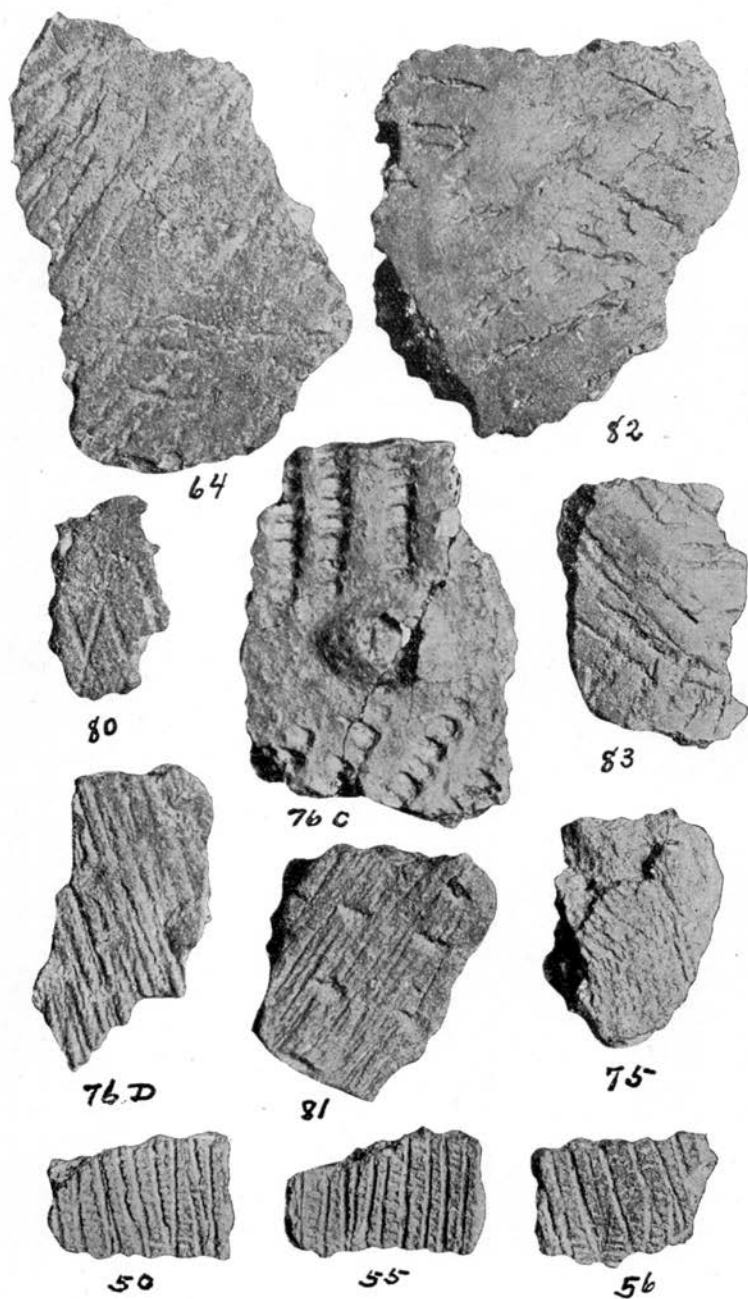
This is likely to be a long drawn out matter as during some summers not a single opportunity to collect may be afforded on account of too high water.

WAUKON, IOWA.



Arrow heads and scrapers of flint from "High Bank," two miles south-east of Waukon Junction, Ia. Actual size.

Orr: An Apparently Very Old Prehistoric Camp Site



Fragments of pottery, actual size, from "High Bank," two miles south-east of Waukon Junction, Iowa.